

Alaska Committee

July 13, 1956

Dr. I. George Nace
257 Fourth Avenue
New York 10, New York

Dear Dr. Nace:

Thank you for sending us a copy of the letter of June 21st from the Rev. Fred McGinnis, Superintendent of the Alaska Mission of the Methodist Church, in which he sends us the information that on June 18th the First Methodist Church board of Ketchikan voted full church status to the North End Chapel which has been operating as a church school. In this letter Mr. McGinnis also states "It is my opinion that a Presbyterian church in the (North End) area would be divisive and over-lapping in services in this particular area and I would hope that their development might be approved on the basis of its present location or some other location than the North End area."

This letter from Mr. McGinnis brings considerable surprise. For several years the Presbyterians have brought before the Alaska Committee the matter of moving the location of our church northward from the center of the city. This matter has been before the Alaska Committee with approval subject to clearance with the Protestant group in Alaska. It was presented there in the meeting in February and approved on the grounds that no comity question was involved. Also, about a year ago the proposal was made by the same board of the Methodist Church in Ketchikan that the North End Chapel be turned over to the Presbyterians at the time of our relocation in that area. It is interesting to note that after all of these actions have been taken it now comes to light that the official board of the Methodist Church in Ketchikan has voted full church status to the North End Chapel and without reference either to the Alaska Committee of the Division of Home Missions or the Alaska Association of Churches.

We quite agree with you that this matter should be put on the docket of the next meeting of the Alaska Committee and add to it the question as to the meaning of comity and cooperation on the field.

Sincerely yours,

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cc: The Rev. Fred McGinnis
Dr. R. Rolland Armstrong
Dr. Vernon Middleton
Bishop William Gordon
The Rev. Paul Moser

J. Earl Jackman, Secretary
Department of Work in Alaska

REPORT OF THE COMITY COMMITTEE

Of The Interdenominational Conference On
Work In Alaska

Submitted to the delegates and representatives of the Interdenominational Conference On Work in Alaska in session at All Saints' Episcopal Church, Anchorage, Alaska October 17-19, 1955.

From time to time certain comity agreements have been approved between denominational groups with work in Alaska. Apparently these agreements served a good purpose for a term period. Evidently exceptions were made growing out of growing change in Territorial patterns until today a need is evident for the reinterpretation of the meaning of comity as related to the work of Protestant denominations in Alaska.

We would like to re-emphasize the statement made on December 10, 1951 in the Master List Agreement available in the record:

"We firmly believe that the necessity for strengthening and expanding the work of the church was never more pressing that it is today and that the opportunity for accomplishing this was never greater.....

"Any serious effort to meet Alaska's need in a constructive manner comparable to the opportunity and the responsibility they represent would overtax the combined resources of all communions both in leadership and financial support."

What was partially apparent back in 1919 and 1920 (when comity was again reviewed) and in 1951 is today . glaringly apparent in the new and emerging Alaska.

We pause to pay tribute to those who have gone before us in ecumenical endeavors. We recognize their labors in the field of inter-church cooperation with the goal of bringing Christ and a Christian Society to Alaska.

This instrument today presented is presented with the following intent:

- (1) Review by the representatives of the various denominational Boards and agencies gathered in Anchorage for this conference; with changes,
- (2) Submission to the various denominational Home Missions Divisions (or comparable body) with suggested changes noted and returned to the February, 1956 meeting of the "Alaska Conference Of Church Administrators" (For want of better title. The title to be selected by the conference now in session)
- (3) Further study and review by the February meeting in Fairbanks and return to the denominational boards for final review and possible acceptance.
- (4) As and when the above steps have been taken, it is expected that the agreement will become the "working agreement" and in force until superceded by some subsequent agreement . It is hoped the meaning and significance of the agreements will be transmitted to all denominational groups with work in Alaska and that the acceptance will be official and binding for the parties to the agreement.

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The Comity Principles

(1) We recognize comity must be more than "manners". It must increasingly mean "planning and adjustment". As Alaska faces its tremendous period of change ahead, we recognize the need for intelligent planning in order to conserve the "dedicated" gifts of the church at home and at the same time endeavor to meet the actual needs for churches in the cities, the towns and the rural areas.

(2) The principles listed in the Master List Agreement under date of December 10, 1951 have been reviewed by our committee and we agree, in principle, with these several provisions wherever there is applicability to Alaska.

(3) Urban: We recognize communities of 5000 and over in Alaska as Urban centers. This means 5000 in the general area covered by the "school district".

If, for any reason, a community loses about 25% of its population within a 5 year period, it is suggested the situation presented by that community be reviewed.

An urban or suburban area shall be regarded as adequately churched when it has one church for each 2,000 available Protestant preference.

- a. Within a territory constituting a natural parish, i.e. one which is partly or fully enclosed by primary barriers (rivers, lakes, irregular terrain, large parks or cemeteries, industrial installations, military installations, railroad sidings, multiple rail road tracks, and kindred phenomena)
- b. In which population is relative homogeneous as to race and language, and
- c. Exhibits social affinity for the existing churches and
- d. Is not connected with churches elsewhere; provided also
- f. That the existing churches receive into Christian fellowship all evangelical Christians.

Determination of the size of the exclusive parish of a given church and the distance between churches should recognize that (A) within a denomination, churches should not be placed nearer than one and three-fourths miles; and (B) within Protestantism clustering may be permitted according to the density of the population of Protestant preference.

- a. The parish should be associated with the area of local social patterns such as school attendance, trade, and recreation.
- b. In densely populated areas, the clustering of churches in places of strategic location is not necessarily competitive, especially if the churches are complementary of character and provided that the ratio of available Protestant population suggested above is regarded.
- c. In areas not densely settled there should be not less than one mile between churches of different denominations. Exceptions may be made through agreement in the committee in Alaska and the Alaska Committee of the national boards.

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A condition of overchurching shall be recognized when there is more than one church to a 2000 available population in a natural parish (as outlined above) especially when connected with declining population, either absolutely or of that type of population which historically has furnished the constituency of the existing church; or a condition of declining churches as to numbers, support, and character of programs; and of increasing demand on the part of churches for denominational assistance.

(4) Rural areas: under 5000 population (school district)

Exclusive occupancy:

Where an area is exclusively occupied by one church, that church shall see to it that the sacraments or ordinances are administered and the program diversified to meet the varied needs of all Protestants in the area.

Such a church must be willing to receive into Christian fellowship all evangelical christians without submitting them to doctrinal or other tests which do not accord with the standards of their respective faiths and shall provide for them full membership or membership through affiliation or association.

a. Maximum occupancy shall not exceed one church for each 500 population potentially homogeneous and reasonably accessible to the church building location.

b. The minimum standard of service and equipment for such a church shall be:

1. pastoral oversight on some regular, systematic basis wherever possible; (Resident pastor devoting full time to the work of the ministry, is outlined as minimum by National Congress on Home Missions)

2. Public worship and religious training every Sunday;

3. Annual vacation church school;

4. Youth programs;

5. Adequate program of community service;

6. Edifice reasonably adequate to meet the needs of the community for worship, religious service and training.

c. Exclusive occupancy may be achieved in cooperation with the local people in the following ways:

1. Through comity assignment by comity committee (local?) (national?)

2. Through unconditional withdrawal of all other churches in favor of the one given exclusive occupancy. This may be achieved through denominational executives arranging for a reciprocal exchange of fields

Joint occupancy: competition shall be said to exist in a jointly occupied field when:

1. a church in such a field receives aid without planning jointly with the other churches for the complete religious life of all Protestants in the community (such competition shall be removed wither by the church entering into joint planning or by the cessation of the support in aid); or when 2. any one of the churches shall fail to provide the following minimum service:

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A minister accessible for pastoral care;
Weekly worship and religious education;
An annual vacation church school;
A woman's organization;
A youth program.

We recommend that the executives eliminate competitive grants in aid at the earliest possible date when requested by the committee set up within Alaska.

General considerations:

1. When a community is under 5000 population new church locations should be reviewed and approved by the committee set up within Alaska.

2. In remote areas where population moves in temporarily (for any reason or moves in for a period specified (special construction, etc.,) it is agreed that the church nearest the temporary project (if there is only one church in the community in or nearest the construction area) is expected to serve the people related to the project. This service would be a service representing the Protestant churches in Alaska and the church would be certified by proper authorities, wherever desirable and requested.

If it is impossible for the church in the general area to serve the project, the matter should be referred to the committee within Alaska and/or the Alaska Committee, nationally, with recommendations as to the need in the specialized ministry for determination.

3. "Boom Communities" the committee in Alaska should be aware and advised of emerging "boom communities" in order for plans to be made for ministry to the given area, in harmony with existing understandings and other factors which are related.

4. Over-churching remote areas: in communities with under 500 population, or in predominantly native communities and villages, where one church has traditionally ministered; new church groups entering are heartily discouraged and unalterably opposed. Our strongest opposition should be lodged with the headquarters and leaders of the denominations so attempting to enter (or who have already entered, in the case of present problems presented). It is suggested that these leaders be appealed to on the basis of Christian conscience in the matter, "sense of fair-play" and "justice". The appeal should be accompanied with a request that the headquarters (or administration) provide no funds nor assistance nor encouragement in such endeavors.

Where this principle is over-ridden or ignored, it is suggested that steps be taken to advise the community of the protest being lodged and opposition voiced both by the organization within Alaska and the National committee, (Alaska committee of Home Missions Council).

Additional considerations:

Agreements on health problems and solutions;
Agreements on social welfare services (children);
Agreements on cooperative relationships in education.

Relation of projects already proposed and in some tangible way provided for in light of the above general agreements.

Relation to potential chapel on campus at University of Alaska to comity arrangements;

Other matters.

Committee: Fred McGinnis, John Mollett, William J. Gordon, Rolland Armstrong, and Harold Beck.

